

# **2017 APAAC Annual Victim Advocate Conference**

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## **In Their Words – “Why I Stayed, What Happened When I Left”**

Presented by:

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Trainer

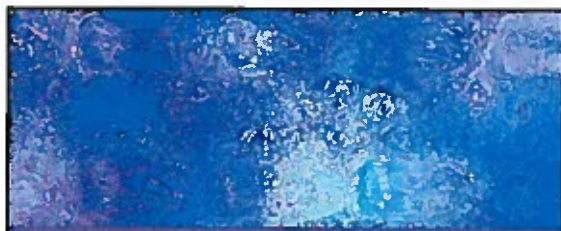
Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, Phoenix,  
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**In Their Words – “Why I Stayed, What Happened When I Left”**

Doreen Nicholas, Awareness and Training Manager




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**Learning Objectives**

- Better understand barriers to leaving an abusive relationship
- Be aware of the dangers in leaving an abusive relationship
- Grasp the importance of a compassionate response to victims/survivors

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**Advocacy Approach**

**In the Past:**

- Safety Plan focused on leaving
- Some services included rules that reinforced this

**Unintended consequences of past focus:**

**Survivors heard from us or thought:**

- Don't contact us or don't return for services
- Believe program can't help them if they don't leave
- Feel pressured to leave and judgment if they choose not to
- Denied services from some systems if don't leave, if leave but return, or if continue to contact abuser

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### Reasons for Contact

- May want to stay in relationship with abusive partner
- May be considering reconciling
- Sharing custody, visitation exchanges, shared parenting plans
- On-going contact due to work, school, community activities
- Living in small or rural community where contact is still likely

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### Why I Stayed With My Abusive Partner




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### Fear

- "He threatened to take our daughter to Mexico and said I wouldn't be able to find them."
- "He said he was suicidal and talked about killing himself the night he hit me; I didn't want our daughter to find him dead in our house."
- "I've heard too many stories about DCS punishing women who have been abused by taking their children away."

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### Fear

- "He was affiliated with gangs and I feared for my safety."
- "In addition, he told me that he would kill my family if I left him then he would look for me and find me to kill me also. I didn't want to put my family's lives in danger."
- "I also had witnessed him hurt other people. He threatened to hurt me and my family if I ever told of his criminal activities."

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### Fear

- "Slowly, the violence grew more frequent and violent. It was too hard to see."
- "I was terrified but who would believe me if I told them that this 'Law Enforcement Officer' was secretly beating his wife and kids every time he was not at work."

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### Threats

- "It took every ounce of courage for me to confront him. When I finally told him the way he treats me is unacceptable he denied any responsibility, told me I'm crazy, overreacting and a horrible person."
- "Then he told me he wanted a divorce and any time after that when I stood up to him he would say things like 'That's it! I've had it with you. I'm calling the lawyer.'"
- "He made other veiled threats too that caused me to fear what he'd do to me."
- "He warned me he'd make me sorry for telling so I stayed."

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### Threats

- "First he threatened suicide."
- "Once the kids came along he threatened to take custody of the kids."
- "He called my mother and told her he was rushing home because I had gone berserk and am acting suicidal. She called and told me to get out of the house immediately afraid he was setting up a scenario (e.g. "Officer, I came home to find her dead of a self-inflicted gunshot. She's been acting suicidal lately.") I knew he was setting me up and left and went into hiding for 2 weeks. He was livid."

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### Children

- "I stayed with my partner because he's the father of my daughter."
- "I was pregnant and could not work."
- "My abuser threw me down stairs when I was 35 weeks pregnant."
- "We have a child."

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### Money

- "He told me he could offer us the world. Our family grew fast. I did not work."
- "No family. No support from anybody."
- He destroyed my finances."
- "He emptied out the checking and savings accounts and took the only vehicle."

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**Who the Partner Is**

- "Law Enforcement"
- "In a gang"
- "Environmental Scientist"
- "Good Christian man"
- "Highly educated professional business person"
- "Everybody loved him"

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**Barriers to Leaving**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| • Housing          | • Lack of support                        |
| • Money            | • Who the partner is                     |
| • Fear             | • Escalation of abuse                    |
| • Shame            | • Love                                   |
| • Religion/Culture | • Promises partner will change           |
| • Children         | • Further violence against children/pets |
| • Geography        | • Social norms                           |
| • Employment       | • Lack of resources                      |
| • Residency Status | • Trauma                                 |
| • Disability       | • Literacy/Language                      |

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**CAUTION**

Leaving can be the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence!

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### Why?

- Loss of control
- Ownership
- Insecurity
- Unrealistic expectations
- Punishment for doing him/her "wrong"
- Possessiveness
- "If I can't have you \_\_\_\_\_"
- "If you're not going to be with me \_\_\_\_\_"

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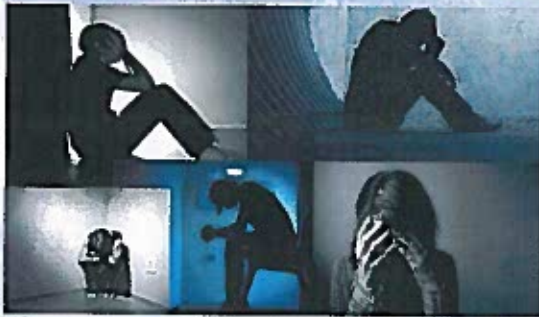
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### Yet we still ask – Why Don't They Leave?!




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### How about -

The question is NOT  
"Why didn't the victim leave?"

The better question is  
"Why does the abuser  
choose to abuse?"

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**And, many times  
experience very few  
consequences**

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**What Happened When I  
Left**




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**When I did leave**

- He hit me with my daughter in my arms
- He slammed me into a corner of the wall and knocked me unconscious
- Even with an order of protection he tried to take my kids from their bus stop
- I got a restraining order, he broke into my condo and tried to kill me.
- He showed up at my work, at the place I was staying and at my church where he attacked me.
- I had to leave the state and spent the next 6 years in and out of court.

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| To -   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My sister – she said she didn't want to hear it any more</li> <li>• My pastor – helped me make copies of important documents, gave me safety planning resources</li> <li>• An OB/GYN nurse – gave me a list of Domestic Violence programs, I found a support group</li> <li>• God – a week later I went to lunch with a co-worker who was non-judgmental and supportive</li> <li>• The police- I was told to deal with it, to toughen up and leave him. I was not given any referrals. They acted like I was a bother.</li> <li>• My mom – said she would pray for me then told my uncle who helped me move out a few weeks later.</li> </ul> |

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| To -  |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My friends – they didn't believe it was happening because I didn't "just leave then"</li> <li>• My abuser's family – they told me to toughen up, this was just the way the family was and to deal with it</li> <li>• My family – they did not understand. They wanted us to get over it and move on.</li> <li>• My employer (Law Enforcement Office) – nobody did or said anything, I could not talk about it to anyone, they would not serve an order of protection on him</li> </ul> |

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### To -

- A Christian Counselor – helped me understand that my abusive husband had broken the marriage covenant by abusing me.
- The police- were great each time they came out (4 times in a year). Their consistent, non-judgmental response helped me finally leave.
- The court -- rushed me through the order of protection hearing, when it was contested by my abusive ex the judge told me he didn't think I was afraid of my ex and tossed it out. This emboldened my husband to more overtly harass me.
- To my lawyers – they were clueless about abuse

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### To -

- My neighbors - who called 911 and took me to the emergency room
- A friend – took me to a shelter
- Legal Aid – helped me with a restraining order, gave me support and resources
- Campus Police – told me I would lose custody of my daughter because I was living in a homeless shelter
- Friends – they asked me what I did wrong, that I must have done something horrible, they assured me he is not this type of person, I needed to work harder to not make him angry
- Church members – ignored the abuse that happened to me in front of them, they figured it was none of their business

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### To -

- My brother – he assumed I deserved the abuse, scolded me for thinking that marriage was supposed to be for happiness, told me to just go along with what he says
- My sister – saw it, understood it and supported me
- The police -- responded in a helpful way
- My boss- helped me have a flexible schedule
- My best friend – was supportive, understanding and helpful

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## Why We Stayed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU50HksugZk&feature=youtu.be>

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## What I Want Advocates to Know




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## Know

- "How scary it is to leave"
- "The fear of DCS and the courts"
- "The reality of emotional trauma"
- "You don't know what I'm going through"
- "The importance of using terminology I can understand"
- "It's important to be patient with me"
- "How effective it is to build a relationship with me"
- "It matters to me that your words and actions match"

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### Know

- "The importance of having kleenex on hand"
- "Every time you ask me to tell you what happened I live through it again, review any reports or files you have on my situation beforehand"
- "I need to know you care, that I'm not just another file on your caseload"
- "It's critical to give good resources and referrals, that the places still exist"
- "Explaining processes and what to expect is important"
- "It can happen to anyone, don't stereotype victims"
- "Options are nice to have"

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### Know

- "We don't trust anyone, don't take it personally"
- "It doesn't help to quote statistics to me"
- "You may be my first point of contact or experience with the court, how you respond is important if I take the next step or not"
- "It's important to listen to me, to answer my questions, even if they seem obvious or silly to you"
- "Getting safe and free from an abusive partner is a long process. Be patient with me"
- "I can't make him stop hurting me, how can you help me with that?"

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### A Compassionate Response to Victims/Survivors

- I believe you.
- I support you.
- I'm concerned for your safety.
- I'm concerned for the safety of your children.
- You don't deserve to be treated like that.
- It's not your fault.
- You are not alone.

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